



COVID-19 Planning—Water Treatment Plant Staffing Continuity

3/17/2020

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How can we prepare for potential staff shortages due to the outbreak?

- Review or develop mutual aid agreements with neighboring utilities with similar treatment plants. A similar technology is more important than a similar size.
- Join [WAWARN](#).
- Cross-train existing staff.
- Contact former operators with plant-specific knowledge to determine if they could be available in an emergency.
- Contact operator certification at dwopcert@doh.wa.gov to evaluate eligibility of your existing staff to qualify for the needed level of certification and discuss other alternatives such as temporary certification.
- Contact local contract operators to assess if they have the required qualifications and availability to help operate your plant. Contract operators are listed at doh.wa.gov/opcert.
- Prepare alternative sources of supply (groundwater, emergency interties) to be activated if needed.
- Invest in technology to allow active remote plant monitoring and bolster distance meeting capabilities for on-site personnel.
- Make sure SOPs for critical activities are written down, up-to-date, and readily available.
- Evaluate whether operators could be sequestered at the plant, if necessary.

2. We're currently having difficulty finding enough staff to operate our water treatment facility. What should we do?

- Keep in mind that a qualified shift operator can run the plant when the lead operator is temporarily unavailable.
- Contact your mutual aid partner(s) to see if they can help.
- Contact WAWARN if you are a member.
- As a last resort, contact your local EOC and ask for assistance. The process for doing so is outlined on the Washington Military Department's Emergency Management Division website at mil.wa.gov/logistics-and-resources. Use the correct form (213RR).
- Be specific about what you need! Give the type of treatment plant you operate and the plant rating. For example, a 0.5 MGD, level 1 slow sand filtration plant with chlorine disinfection.
- If you are unable to maintain normal operation due to lack of staffing, contact your DOH regional office to discuss whether a health advisory is needed.

Eastern Region

509-329-2100

Northwest Region

253-395-6750

Southwest Region

360-236-3030

3. We have a knowledgeable staff member who is capable of operating the plant, but doesn't yet have the certification level needed. Can they apply for temporary certification?

- Contact operator certification at dwopcert@doh.wa.gov to discuss options.

4. We have a local operator certified in another state. Will DOH honor another state's certification?

- Contact operator certification at dwopcert@doh.wa.gov to discuss reciprocity and other options. Often this can be done very quickly.

5. How can we reduce the risk that our operations staff will become sick?

- Make sure all staff understand and follow [basic recommendations](#) to protect themselves (handwashing, avoiding touching face, maintaining personal distance).
- Provide operators with downtime between shifts to ensure they are adequately rested.
- Have operators self-monitor their temperature and not report to work if elevated.
- Use disinfecting wipes to clean SCADA stations and other high touch surfaces at every shift change.
- Prohibit non-essential personnel from entering the facility.
- Consider holding staff meetings over the telephone rather than in person.
- Delay or cancel non-essential gatherings of utility staff.
- Request electronic acknowledgement of receipt for all deliveries to your plant.

6. How can we reduce workload for existing staff?

- Consider strategies to reduce flow rate and flow rate changes through the plant, such as
 - Using alternative sources that have lower staffing needs.
 - Activating emergency interties.
 - Coordinating with large or wholesale customers to minimize rapid changes in demand.
- Defer non-essential maintenance activities.
- Delay non-critical tasks or delegate them to other utility staff.
- Hire a contractor to perform routine equipment maintenance and/or calibration and verification of critical instrumentation (turbidimeters, chlorine analyzers, pH analyzers). Instruct outside contractors to follow all protective measures in place at the plant.